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THE TOKENS OF PERDITION.

"Which is to them an evident token of perdition."—Philippians i. 28.

WE all know what is meant by a token. When we hear the thunder rolling at a distance, and see the clouds collecting among the hills, and becoming every moment darker and more heavy, we know that a tempest is approaching. When we witness the workings of disease,—behold it consuming the beauty of youth, and the vigor of manhood,—imparting a feverish bloom to the cheek, and a preternatural lustre to the eye,—we know that these are the auguries of death.

These are tokens in the natural world. But the moral world has also its tokens. Most men exhibit certain *religious* phenomena, from which, viewed in connection with the known influence of moral causes, we may estimate their prospects for eternity, and forecast the probabilities of their salvation.

Some of these are tokens for good. When, for instance, we see an individual apparently devoted to the service of God, displaying in his life the controlling power of repentance and faith, and manifesting the fruits of divine grace in the benevolence of his spirit, and the intensity of his efforts for the welfare of men; we feel a strong confidence that his piety is genuine, and that he will, at length, be "made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light." When, too, we behold an unrenewed person deeply serious about religion, sensible of his corruption and guilt, and inquiring, with anxious solicitude, "what he shall do to be saved,"—though we have still many fears that he will relapse into indifference,—we are yet encouraged to hope that these impressions will terminate in vital conversion.

Most fervently could I wish that all men exhibited the cheering indications which have just been mentioned. But I cannot be insensible to the fact, that multitudes present appearances of a far different character,—appearances which, to the spiritually instructed eye, are ominous of approaching ruin, and which fill the pious observer with emotions like those of the benevolent physician, when he discovers in the symptoms of his patient the certain presage of dissolution. In many a countenance of careless levity,—in many a brazen forehead, lifted in bold defiance against the thunder of the Omnipotent,—in many an indurated bosom, that repels, with adamant apathy, the love of a crucified Redeemer—may be seen, displayed in appalling prominence, the “evident tokens of perdition.”

But as those in whom these tokens are most clear and numerous, are usually least conscious of their existence, it will be my object distinctly to describe them.

Before entering upon this subject, however, I would wish to guard against misapprehension, by stating explicitly what we mean when we affirm that particular classes of unconverted men exhibit the omens of destruction. We do *not* mean that the salvation of such persons is *impossible*. We do *not* mean that God, provoked by their perseverance in sin, has withdrawn his Spirit, sealed up their hearts in impenetrable obduracy, and, in the exercise of his holy sovereignty, excluded them from mercy. It may, indeed, be so. Inspiration assures us that He has often done this in the case of incorrigible sinners. But whether He has done it with respect to any who still live and enjoy the means of grace, is a question which lies far beyond the ken of mortals. It is not for short-sighted human vision to pierce the veil of eternity, and read, in the volume of Jehovah’s deep and inscrutable counsels, the final destiny of any immortal being. The secrets of that volume Omniscience only can penetrate.

“Closed is the book to Gabriel’s eye,
And sealed the doom it gives,
Nor dares the favorite angel pry
Between those folded leaves.”

In asserting, therefore, that certain moral characteristics forebode the ultimate condemnation of those who exhibit them, we do not presumptuously attempt to disclose the hidden sentence which the Almighty may have passed upon such individuals;—but simply to show that, by their own voluntary infatuation, they have placed themselves in the power of circumstances, and under the influence of causes, which render their conversion to God, and, consequently, their escape from the wrath to come, extremely problematical. If, indeed, they would repent and believe the Gospel, they would undoubtedly be saved;—for all who thus comply with the overtures of mercy, however aggravated their guilt or desperate their condition, are delivered from the curse of the violated law, and become heirs of eternal life. But such is the strength of the barriers which their own conduct has

thrown in the way of their repentance and submission to Christ, as to produce a fearful improbability that they will ever exercise these affections, and thus obtain a preparation for the world of glory. That this improbability may and does exist in specific cases, is evident, not merely from the deductions of reason, and the known connection between cause and effect, but also from the unerring testimony of revelation. The Word of God, while it proclaims the freeness and universality of the offers of salvation, and indiscriminately invites all the perishing children of earth to the overflowing fountain of redeeming love, yet, by declaring that almost insuperable obstacles oppose the reformation of the inveterately wicked, and the entrance of the rich and worldly into the kingdom of heaven, plainly and solemnly intimates that the eternal prospects of some impenitent sinners are more dark and appalling than those of others.

With these preliminary remarks, I proceed to describe those features in the character and condition of particular classes of unregenerate men, which render their conversion improbable, and, in the fearful language of the text, are "to them an evident token of perdition."

I. *The first is a false hope of piety.*—That, among the nominal friends of the Redeemer, there are many who deceive themselves with a spurious religion, and while they have a name that they live, are in reality dead, is a fact which must be apparent even to an unreflecting observer. The Scriptures expressly declare that those only who possess the spirit and obey the commands of Christ, are his true disciples. They teach us that all the subjects of saving grace experience a moral renovation, in consequence of which they renounce their sins, separate themselves from the world, live as the inheritors of immortality, and manifest an intense and unremitted devotion to the cause of their God and Savior. And yet we see multitudes in the enclosure of the church whose conduct is widely at variance with this inspired description. In their temper and habits they appear but little different from the irreligious around them. They betray an addiction to the vanities of earth, and a disregard of eternal interests, as gross and prevailing, as if this narrow round of months and years were the whole of their existence. They evince no solicitude for the prosperity of Zion; make no exertions for the salvation of sinners; and by their inconsistency and unfaithfulness, "crucify the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame." And is it possible that such are real Christians? Can we, by any allowable stretch of charity, believe that they have felt the renewing and sanctifying power of the Spirit, cleansing their polluted natures, eradicating their evil dispositions, and raising them from their death in sin to a life of holiness? No. "By their fruits ye shall know them." Judging by this infallible rule, we can form no other opinion of their state, than that, beguiled by an egregious self-deception, they have laid the "flattering unction" to their souls, that they are converted and pardoned, while

they are still "in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity."

Various causes may have led them to embrace such a delusion. It may be, that satiated with earthly pursuits, and disgusted at the fallacy of sublunary enjoyments, they have substituted a morbid weariness of the world for the heavenly-mindedness which the Gospel requires. Borne down by the pressure of affliction, they may have supposed themselves resigned to the Divine Will, because, in their dejection, they have ceased to struggle against it. Being ignorant of the righteousness of God, they may have gone about to establish their own righteousness, until they have, at length, come to imagine their salvation attained. Or, what is still more probable, they may have been lulled into security by a counterfeit conversion. A period has, perhaps, occurred in their history, when, by some impressive combination of circumstances, their fears were excited, and their consciences aroused. Eager to obtain relief from their guilty apprehensions, but unwilling to obtain it by the exercise of repentance and faith in Christ, they caught at some consoling promise of Scripture, or some imaginary change in their own feelings, as an evidence that their sins were forgiven. Under the opiate thus administered, their anxiety subsided, their distress passed away; and they mistook the quietude which succeeded, for the peace of reconciliation with God.

But, in which ever of these ways they have been induced to regard themselves as pious, the fact that they have done so, is replete with peril, and prophetic of ruin. Soothed by a groundless belief of safety, they have sunk into a slumber deep and unbroken as that of the sepulchre. And can any situation be more hazardous? What can awaken those who sleep under the potent anodyne, that their preparation for eternity is already accomplished? A lethargy, strong as death, has closed their ears, and blinded their eyes, and steeled their hearts. To every voice of warning, or of entreaty, they are insensible. Array before them all the thrilling statements of the Sacred Word, with respect to the guilt and danger of impenitent sinners, and all the expostulations, and commands, and threatenings, with which it urges them "to flee from the wrath to come." Do they feel the force of such an appeal? No; how can they? They do not view themselves as impenitent, and, consequently, consider the message as having no reference to their own case. Change your theme. Address them as professing Christians. Admonish them of their liability to be deceived as to their interest in the Savior. Enforce the necessity of self-examination. Display the solemn truth, that "if any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his;" and that it is the extreme of folly to presume they "are born of God," unless they daily live to his glory. Still they are unmoved. While the contrite and lowly "tremble at the word of the Lord," they remain without disquiet or alarm. No doubt, no misgiving, no suspicion of the unsoundness of their state, breaks the marble stillness of their repose. They silence every disturbing whisper with the fatal sophism, that,

because real Christians have exhibited occasional declensions, their own habitual worldliness is consistent with vital religion. Thus their false hope, "like the pointed rod that turns away the lightning," wards off from them, in every direction, the bolt of truth. Cased in complete mail, and intrenched on every side by "a refuge of lies," they are inaccessible to attack, and invulnerable to conviction. What, then, is the prospect that they will discover their mistake, before "their feet stumble upon the dark mountains," and they sink into hell? The Almighty, it is true, may yet undeceive and save them; but there is little reason to expect that he will. He has no where promised to do it; and both the Bible and observation prove, that the instances in which he has done it, are exceedingly rare. To no class of sinners does he afford less encouragement, and on none has he pronounced a more awful doom. He has declared that "their last state is worse than the first," and that their trust shall be "as the giving up of the ghost." The probability is, therefore, that they will continue to cherish their treacherous delusion, till the light of eternity shall dispel it, and the storm of divine wrath shall come to sweep away their sandy foundation, and overflow, as with a flood, their hiding place. Well, then, may it be said, that a fallacious persuasion of piety is, to those who indulge it, "an evident token of perdition."

II. *Another token, equally fearful, is a premature depravity.*—By this expression it is not my design to imply that all men are not naturally corrupt, but simply to indicate the *development* of that corruption. Though the principle of sin is inherent in every human bosom, it attains a more early and rank luxuriance in some cases than in others. Usually, its progress to flagrant wickedness is gradual. It is seldom, for example, that we see a youth of confirmed and incorrigible profligacy. Years of conflict with moral influences commonly pass away, and middle life or hoary age arrives, before such a character is formed. Instances of this kind, however, do sometimes occur; and it is to them that I now allude.

Methinks I see before me such a youth. He is the son of pious parents. Often, while an infant, they shed over him the tear of solicitude, and breathed an anxious prayer for his eternal happiness. As he grew up, they instilled into his opening mind the precepts of religion,—taught him to read the Scriptures, to bow at the family altar, and to pronounce, with his yet stammering lips, the name of Jesus. During the season of childhood, his sobriety of disposition, tenderness of conscience, and susceptibility of serious feeling, gave cheering promise that he would one day be made an heir of heaven. But the period arrived when he was removed from their watchful care. With their fervent supplications for his welfare, and many an earnest injunction not to forget their counsels, he went forth to tread alone the perilous mazes of the world, and to encounter its temptations. For a time he remained unscathed amid the polluting

atmosphere which encircled him. The force of parental instruction, and the endearing reminiscences of home, preserved him from the contagion of vice. But soon, by the continual friction of evil example, these salutary restraints were weakened. By insensible degrees he began to neglect his Bible, to remit his devotions, to turn away from the sanctuary, to shrink from the ridicule of his gay associates, and to listen, with less abhorrence, to their licentious language. The barriers of a virtuous education being thus overcome, he yielded to their solicitations, participated in their criminal indulgences, made merry over the sparkling wine, frequented the theatre, and revelled in the house of "her whose feet go down to death, and whose steps take hold on hell." Advanced to this point in his headlong career, in order effectually to stifle the voice of admonition, and efface at once the lingering vestiges of former impressions, he next resorted to the haunts of infidelity, sat in the seat of the scoffer, and drank the deadly cup which grey-haired atheists mingle for their unwary victims. Having, by such a process, completed his degeneracy, and broken asunder all the bonds of conscience and religion, he now presents a melancholy example of precocious impiety. Though scarcely arrived at manhood, he is a veteran in guilt. With remorseless audacity, he tramples on every thing sacred and holy; makes a jest of his early convictions; sneers at moral principle; derides the solemn sanctions of inspiration; and defies the vengeance of the Eternal. And can we, while contemplating the immortal destiny of such an individual, perceive in it a single ray of hope? Must not the fact, that one so young in years is so old in sin, be deemed a mournful presage of reprobation? Do we not see the mark of "the pit" in every feature of his condition and character? Who can predict of him aught but an abandoned life, a miserable death, and an undone eternity? His deliverance from such a doom would be a miracle of mercy,—a departure from the ordinary course of converting grace, as astonishing as it is unfrequent. He has placed himself within the verge of a whirlpool that rarely gives back its prey; and though it is still in the compass of Omnipotence to draw him from its fatal power, there is far more cause to fear that, after a few rapid and giddy circles, he will go down the yawning vortex into the abyss of despair.

III. *Another token, of similar import, is an inveteracy in transgression.*—The almost invincible force of habit is a subject of universal remark. Small must be his acquaintance with men, who does not know that to relinquish what has become familiar to them by custom or association, is an effort of the highest difficulty. To change even a bodily attitude to which they are used, or to renounce a wonted corporeal gratification, is as arduous as it is painful. Their whole frame feels the alteration, and cries out against it. The same fact is still more apparent in their moral nature. When they have long followed a given course of conduct, the adoption of a contrary one is well nigh impossible. Hence it is obvious that a protracted persever-

ance in iniquity must render the repentance, and, consequently, the salvation of those who are guilty of it, fearfully dubious. In order to attain that vital union with Christ which is indispensable to forgiveness, there must be an entire abandonment of every unholy practice which a life of irreligion has generated and matured; for "they that are Christ's put off the old man and his deeds, and crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts." But to do this requires a seriousness of purpose, and a firmness of self-denial, which few will exercise. Even in cases where the sinful habit to be subdued is not of a flagitious kind, but consists merely in a uniform neglect of Christian duty, and a supreme attachment to the world; yet, when deep-rooted by time, its correction is nearly impracticable. It has grown with the growth of the unconverted man, strengthened with his strength, extended to all his plans of action and modes of thought, imbued all his feelings, interwoven itself with all his faculties, become the pervading element of his inward being; and thus has produced a fixedness of character, a hardness of heart, and an obstinacy of impenitence, which spread over his eternal prospects the gloom of night. Alas! how improbable it is that he will ever burst the fast-riveted bondage of such a state, and stand forth a disenthralled and regenerated child of God "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may he, who is accustomed to do evil, learn to do well."

But if this be true in the instance just supposed, incomparably more hopeless must be his condition, who has not only lived all his days in religious indifference, but has long travelled the broad highway of open immorality. What rational ground is there to expect the reformation of one who has, for years, been addicted to licentiousness or intemperance? At intervals, when the light of truth penetrates the thick darkness of his besotted mind, and conscience, startled by the intrusion, wakes her sleeping thunders, he may feel his captivity, and clank his chains, and struggle for release. But it comes not. Or if, for a time, it seem to be achieved, its continuance is momentary. The tyrant, to whom he has sold himself, remits his sway only to resume it with more terrific energy and a sterner despotism, when the season of alarm has passed. Like the "unclean spirit," so awfully described by our Savior, he returns from his temporary repulse with seven-fold strength, claims his victim with a decision inexorable as death, and binds him more firmly than ever in the iron fetters of his power. Who, without anguish, can contemplate the circumstances of such an individual? To see an immortal creature thus situated,—to behold him, by an infatuated persistence in sin, at length irreclaimably enslaved by it,—is a spectacle over which an angel might weep—"nay, it is one over which the Lord of angels has wept with unavailing compassion." Miserable man! by his own suicidal presumption he has flung himself into a torrent, whose black and swollen waters are rapidly hurrying him to destruction. He may resolve, and strive, and shriek for help, and make convulsive efforts to escape; but the impetuous stream still bears him onward. And now, as the

roar of the cataract strikes louder on his ear, and the wild waves foam and toss around him, he buffets the current with feeblér stroke, and waning resolution, till despair flashes on his soul, and with a cry of horror that pierces the heavens, he is swept over the dizzy brink, and disappears.

IV. *Another token of perdition is a confirmed belief of destructive error.*—The confidence which the votaries of error repose in its delusions, is widely different in different persons. With some, it is little more than a cherished wish that their system were true, and an anxious endeavor to make it appear so, combined with many secret fears that it will prove to be false. Such usually exhibit a sensitiveness to attack, and a violence in repelling it, which indicate a lurking consciousness of the insecurity of their position, and show that they are not yet immovably fixed in it. Others manifest a more settled credence. By the constant repetition of sophistical arguments, they have so perverted their moral sense, as to "call evil good, and good evil," to "put darkness for light, and light for darkness," to confound the distinctions between sin and holiness, and to pursue the downward road to the pit, with an unflinching trust that it will end amid the glories of the upper world. It is to this class that we refer, when we affirm that an establishment in fundamental error is the precursor of ruin. Take the case of the man, whose obliquity of heart has led him to impugn the justice of God, and to question the verity of future punishment, until he has, at last, fully embraced the monstrous doctrine, that all men, whatever their conduct here, will be alike happy hereafter,—and you will find, that to disabuse him of it, palpably baseless though it be, is extremely difficult, if not impossible. It is a quality of the human mind, that what it long desires and strives to believe, it often, through a species of self-imposture, does believe, with a tenacity which no opposing evidence can overcome. It is thus with the individual we are describing. At first he only wished there were no retribution beyond the grave. He did not dare to presume there was none. But finding such a persuasion necessary to his repose in sin, he set himself, with untiring diligence, to acquire it. By silencing the voice of God within him;—by insulating the statements of the Bible, and wresting them from their connections;—by turning away from the teachers of truth to the guidance of those who cry "peace, when there is no peace,"—he, at length, attained the end so earnestly sought, and settled down on the fatal heresy that the final condemnation of the wicked is a fiction. To the conclusion thus formed he adheres with inflexible obstinacy. The love of ease, the pride of opinion, and, above all, the enmity of the carnal heart to the requirements of the Gospel, render him unwilling to perceive, that the structure, which he has erected with so much labor, and fortified with so much care, is "built on the sand." Conscious that if he discards the hypothesis on which he has adventured his immortal interests, he must either submit to the terms of sovereign mercy, or

remain without hope, he clings to it, as the drowning mariner clings to the sinking wreck, and resists, with the energy of desperation, every attempt to tear him from it. Place before him the unequivocal declarations of Scripture respecting the endless misery of those who die impenitent, and the fearful coincidence of these declarations with the decisions of reason, the history of the divine government, and the unutterable anxiety which the Son of God and all inspired men have felt in view of the doom of sinners. It affects him not. He evades the force of all these proofs by distorting their import, or denying their application. What, then, but the disclosures of eternity, can convince him that without repentance and faith in Christ, he must inevitably perish? If such a conviction ever is produced, while his day of probation continues, it must be effected through the instrumentality of divine truth, applied by the enlightening power of the Holy Spirit. But he has already repudiated the truth, and spurned, it is to be feared, beyond recall, the heavenly influence which alone can give it efficacy. And if this be so, where, I again ask, is the probability that he will be brought to see his peril, before his "redemption has ceased forever?" Jehovah has, we admit, sometimes arrested persons of this description, torn off the veil of falsehood from their eyes, broken up their league with death, and their covenant with hell, and made them the trophies of his victorious grace. But such conversions are exceptions to his general mode of procedure, and, therefore, can afford no assurance that a similar display of distinguishing mercy will be put forth in favor of the man whose case we are considering. On the contrary, every aspect of his condition and of his conduct presents appalling indications, that he is among the number of those on whom "God has sent a strong delusion, that they should believe a lie, and be damned, because they believe not the truth, but have pleasure in unrighteousness." How dreadful, then, is a fixed reliance on the doctrine, that there is nothing for the ungodly to fear in a coming world! It is a placid but treacherous river, down which the credulous voyager glides serenely, lulled by the music of its waters, charmed by the beauty of its shores, and praising the smoothness of the current, which he fondly imagines is wafting him to the port of heaven,—till death dispels the hallucination, and he awakes in "the lake of fire."

V. *Another token of perdition is an unsanctified worldly prosperity.*—Irreligious men, in their blindness and insatiation, eagerly covet such prosperity, and deem it a signal proof of the divine regard. But no mistake can be greater. A fulness of sublunary good, when unaccompanied by piety, is to be considered a curse rather than a blessing, inasmuch as it presents an almost insuperable obstacle to the spiritual welfare of those who possess it. Instead of leading them, by the sweet impulse of gratitude, to adore and serve their munificent Benefactor, and, in this manner, preparing them for the enjoyment of his presence in heaven, it more generally stupefies their

consciences, hardens their hearts, engrosses every faculty of their minds and every affection of their souls with a sordid idolatry of perishing vanities, and thus affords an alarming premonition that their earthly felicity is but the prelude to an eternity of torment. That such is often the effect produced by a successful pursuit of secular objects, is abundantly evident from the testimony of facts. In every age of the Church, instances of conversion among the fortunate devotees of wealth and honor have been "like angel's visits, few and far between." While the lowly children of poverty and sorrow have repaired, in crowds, to the arms of that compassionate Redeemer who invites the weary and heavy laden to find rest in his bosom,—the vast majority of the prosperous, the opulent, and the great, despising his salvation, have continued to bask in splendor, to riot in affluence, and to live at ease in their possessions, till their pomp, and luxury, and pleasure have been exchanged for the woes of hell. Nor is it from observation alone that the truth of this statement appears. It is solemnly and explicitly taught in the unerring records of inspiration. Listen to its awful language with respect to the final state of the favored votaries of worldliness. "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." "Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called." "Behold, these are the ungodly that prosper in the world. They are not in trouble as other men, neither are they plagued like other men. Their eyes stand out with fatness, they have more than heart could wish. When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me, till I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end. Surely thou didst set them in slippery places; thou castest them down into destruction." If such be the influence of worldly prosperity, how unspeakably dangerous is the situation of those, who climb its giddy steep, unprotected by religion.

VI. *Another token of perdition, is apathy of mind under divine chastisement.*—The afflictions which so often cast a shade over the lot of mortals, are not the product of accident, or of any fortuitous concurrence of secondary causes. They all proceed from the benevolent Sovereign of the universe and are designed to bring back his revolted subjects to the allegiance which they owe him. And this result they are pre-eminently adapted to accomplish. In none of the means, which God uses to reclaim transgressors, does he approach them with so close a contact, or address them in such tones of power. Their infliction is the highest effort of infinite compassion—the reserved agency to which it applies, when all the resources of goodness and forbearance have been expended in vain. And yet how many are there, on whom even this instrument has been employed without effect, and in whose unrelenting bosoms the rebuke of Jehovah has produced no compunction. What hope, then, is there, that any

thing, in the whole circle of moral influences, will ever bring them into cordial obedience to the cross of Christ? A slight view of the course which God has already pursued with them, will show that such an event is exceedingly doubtful. At first, He loaded them with the gifts of his beneficence, crowned their life with blessings, surrounded them with religious privileges, and sought, by all the subduing appeals of kindness, to overcome their impenitence, and restore them to duty and to heaven. But they were unaffected by his mercies. His benevolence did not warm them into love, nor his tenderness melt them into contrition. They became insolent in their abundance, and said, "who is the Lord, that we should serve him?" All the motives derived from his munificence and long suffering having thus proved unavailing, He next began to press them with adversity. He dried up the streams of his bounty, blighted their worldly expectations, scattered their treasures to the winds, and turned into darkness their visions of pride and glory. Still they were unchecked. They thought a chance had happened to them. Or if they acknowledged the hand of God in their disappointments, it was only to repine at his dealings. He then came nearer to them, removed the objects of their affection, and "took away the desire of their eyes with a stroke." But the visitation excited only the natural anguish of a bereaved heart, mingled with a bitter irreconciliation to the allotments of Providence. They did not consider their ways, nor inquire why they were stricken, but murmured and rebelled under the blow. Like a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke, they grew more restiff and perverse, as the pressure increased. At length, to finish the process of correction, God laid his chastening hand on themselves, smote them with sickness, appointed them days of weariness and nights of pain, brought them to the verge of the tomb, and into the precincts of eternity, that the near view of its terrors might awaken them from the slumber of sin. And yet even this dispensation was unheeded. They felt no dismay, they uttered no prayer, while the fierce pangs of disease thrilled through their frame, and death stood knocking at the door of their mortal tabernacle, threatening every moment, to lay it in the dust. Or if they experienced any alarm, no sooner did the crisis pass, and the day of doom appear to recede, and leave them a longer interval of grace, than they banished their disquietude, and relapsed into their former carelessness. And now, having resisted all the discipline of the Most High, until, wearied by their stubbornness, he has ceased to disturb them, they manifest a stupidity more profound than ever, and sin without restraint or fear. As fire hardens clay, so the furnace of affliction has burned them into more impenetrable obduracy. Is there, then, reason to expect that they will yield to any future means of conversion? Is it likely that they will hereafter be placed in scenes and circumstances more calculated to arouse them than those in which they have already been placed? What can impress and soften hearts on which the rod of the Almighty has fallen and left no scar? Though it is not for us to foretell their fate, but to leave

them to the disposal of that God, whose love they have slighted, and whose judgments they have despised ; still we cannot avoid the apprehension, that in them the terrific threatening of insulted mercy will be verified, "He that being often reprov'd, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."

VII. *Another token of perdition, is a return to insensibility after serious impressions.*—There are multitudes who exhibit this characteristic. During some revival of religion, or under the searching expositions of some pungent sermon, they have been awakened from their natural state of thoughtless security. Their sins have been set in order before them. They have been made to see the importance of an interest in Christ to their present and eternal happiness. They have felt something of the power of the world to come, have shuddered in view of their approaching condemnation, and, in anguish of soul, resolved to attend to their immortal welfare. But their convictions are now effaced, and their resolutions forgotten. By yielding to the drowsy influence of the world, and the strong propensity of the unregenerate heart to repel religious subjects,—by lingering and procrastinating, instead of immediately submitting to God,—by seeking some other source of hope than an unconditional compliance with the overtures of the Gospel ;—they have obliterated every trace of serious feeling, and sunk into ten-fold indifference. How improbable, then, is their salvation ! Every view, which can be taken of their state, conspires to prove that their peril must be extreme. Their very tranquillity is the harbinger of destruction. It is the ease of the expiring patient when raging inflammation terminates in gangrene. It is the repose of the sleeping volcano—the calm which precedes the hurricane—the stupor into which conscience sinks when the palsy of spiritual death begins to settle upon the soul. To all the applications of truth and strivings of the Spirit they are impregnable. No exhibition of the claims of God and of their own duty can be presented to them with which they are not already familiar. No argument, no incentive, no entreaty, can be brought to bear upon their minds, which they have not already disregarded. Nothing, therefore, but a miraculous interposition of sovereign grace can pluck them from the precipice on which they stand. And will such an interposition be made ? It may ; but the general testimony of experience is against the supposition. It is an indubitable fact, that very few of those who, from a state of religious solicitude, decline into apathy, are ever truly converted. Some of them may, at times, manifest symptoms of returning seriousness. When the power of God comes down on the communities in which they reside, and Christians are active and faithful, and sinners are bowing to the cross, and the Redeemer rides forth in his chariot of victory,—they may start from their slumber, mix with the moving host, and seem to be pressing towards the gates of Zion. Still, they seldom make their way to Christ. More commonly, after a fruitless effort to resuscitate their strangled convictions, they relin-

quish the attempt, and resign themselves to the mighty lethargy that enchains them. Like Esau, having suffered the season for securing the blessing to pass unimproved, they find "no place for repentance, though they seek it carefully with tears." But while a small number of the class we are describing may thus evince an occasional and transient concern for their eternal interest, by far the larger portion display an utter recklessness, and, by plunging into dissipation or infidelity, give fearful evidence that the convincing and renewing Spirit has irrevocably departed from them. Thus, "as Paul reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and said, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee." But that "convenient season" never came. Abandoned of God, he surrendered himself to profligacy, was arraigned at the bar of Cæsar for his atrocious practices, banished into Gaul, and there died an irreclaimable reprobate. Such is the melancholy history of thousands, who were once anxious and thoughtful, and appeared to have reached the very borders of the kingdom of heaven; but who, by trifling with their impressions, and delaying to comply with offered mercy, have flung themselves far off from hope, and perished in their sins. In awful accordance with this remark, an Apostle has declared, that "if those, who have once been enlightened, shall fall away, it is impossible to renew them to repentance." Surely, then, if the condition of persons of this character be thus desperate, we may, with an emphasis of meaning, say to them, as our Lord said to Jerusalem, "O that thou hadst known, even thou, in this thy day, the things that belong to thy peace; but now they are hidden from thine eyes."

VIII. *The last token of perdition, which I shall notice, is an impenitent old age.*—The young, I am well aware, are often encouraged to postpone repentance, from a persuasion that they shall become pious in the decline of life, and that that period is more favorable to the attainment of religion than any other. But no expectation can be more delusive. Among the innumerable situations of guilt and danger, in which infatuated mortals place themselves, there are none so forlorn of hope,—so destitute of every cheering promise, as an irreligious old age. The physical powers at that season, are enfeebled and bowed down with the weight of years. The blood flows sluggishly through the shrivelled veins—the muscles are relaxed—the strength fails—the spirits droop—the limbs totter—the step is faltering and slow—the eye, the ear, refuses its office—and the whole frame is oppressed with incurable maladies, and sunk in decrepitude. With this decay of body there is a sympathetic and equal decay of mind. The understanding loses its acuteness, and the memory its retention, and the imagination its buoyancy; the love of enterprise, the vigor of purpose, the courage to encounter difficulties, are gone; and the noble intellect, which once soared abroad and exulted in its might, is reduced to the imbecility of childhood, and waits, in puny helplessness,

the fall of its shattered cell. Nor is this all. The corrosion of time is still more visible in the moral faculties. The conscience is seared, the sensibilities are blunted—the affections are benumbed—the heart is cauterized—and the entire character has acquired an almost invincible stubbornness. How feeble, then, is the prospect that a saving change will be wrought in the man who has thus grown grey in transgression, and on whom all the means of grace have hitherto been employed in vain. Even in the case of those who appear to feel some desire to obtain a preparation for heaven, ere their setting sun shall go down in death, there is such a languor of effort, such an inability to comprehend and remember instruction, and such a fixedness of sinful habits, as well nigh to preclude success. But the great mass of aged sinners feel no such desire. They have long ceased to have any anxiety about their spiritual welfare. They seem scarcely to consider that the soul can be lost, that an eternity of bliss or of woe is before them, or that the hour of their departure for it is near. They cling to the trifles of earth with all the fondness of their early days, clutch their cankered gold in their shaking hands as eagerly as if they were to remain here forever, and manifest no concern, but to secure as much of the world as they can, before the waning lamp of life is extinguished in the darkness of the grave. Oh, it is enough to break the benevolent heart to see a hoary-headed transgressor tottering on the verge of the fathomless gulf, and yet reckless of his impending doom, till his feet slide, and he vanishes in the depths of despair!

Thus have I endeavored to set before you some of those traits in the character of several classes of unregenerate men which render their salvation improbable. In this enumeration, I have by no means included all which might, with propriety, have been embraced in it. But those which have been mentioned are surely sufficient to prove that the spiritual circumstances of vast numbers among the unconverted are solemnly critical.

It is not from any love of such a theme, or from any delight in harrowing up your feelings, that I have been induced to present this topic. God is my witness, that every part of it has been prepared and delivered with a bleeding heart. At the description of each fearful token, I could have sat down and wept, in anguish of spirit, over those who exhibit it. No; it is not because I, a guilty sinner, find pleasure in portraying the perils of my fellow-sinners, that I have called your attention to this subject; but because I, a pardoned sinner,—a sinner from whom numberless marks of perdition have been washed away by the blood of Christ,—would urge you, by the terrors of an impenitent state, to repair to that wondrous fountain, of which I know the efficacy.

On every side, I see crowds of immortal beings growing callous under the means of grace, piling up mountains in their way to heaven, and displaying, in their increasing heedlessness, more clear and mournful signs, that “lost!” “lost!” will soon be inscribed on the

portals of their dwelling. And can I be unaffected—can I be silent—or utter only the notes of peace over a scene like this? No; my soul is moved within me. “Oh! that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night” for the dying and the dead around me. I stand in this “valley of dry bones” and cry, “Hear ye the word of the Lord. Tremble, ye that live carelessly; rise up and be afraid, ye thoughtless ones; for when ye say, peace and safety, sudden destruction cometh, and ye shall not escape.” “Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep, so shall your poverty come as one that travelleth, and your want as an armed man.”

Do any say, It is not possible that the situation of the impenitent should be so alarming, so inconceivably terrible, as it has now been described? Why, then, do the Oracles of Truth uniformly represent it in this aspect? Why have all the inspired servants of God manifested such agonizing solicitude in view of the criminality and danger of irreligious men? Why did the Psalmist exclaim, “I beheld the transgressors and was grieved;”—“rivers of waters run down mine eyes;”—“horror hath taken hold of me, because of the wicked?” Why did an Apostle declare, “I have continual sorrow and heaviness in my heart—for my brethren, my kinsmen, according to the flesh?” And why is there joy in heaven,—why does a fresh tide of rapture spread through all the angelic hosts—when even one sinner repents? Those lofty intelligences, free from the mists and illusions of earth, and dwelling in the pure light of eternity, must know, far better than we, what is the real state of the careless and worldly; and did they not see it to be one of tremendous jeopardy, would they deem the event, which delivers from it, worthy of calling forth such seraphic delight? Oh, then, trust not your own vain imaginations, but believe the infallible word of the Savior, when he assures you, solemnly and plainly, that “Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.” If you will not be convinced by this accumulated testimony,—if you refuse to give heed to the warning which has now been addressed to you,—you will evince, in your indifference to it, another token of perdition, far more dreadful than any which I have previously enumerated. No truth can be set before you more adapted to break up your sinful slumbers, and dispel your false security, than that which this discourse has exhibited. There is nothing in the whole compass of Scripture more appalling; and were it once to be brought home to your hearts, the trumpet of the judgment could not more effectually arouse you. And shall it not arouse you? Can you look, without alarm, upon the fearful picture of your condition which the Divine pencil has drawn? Can you continue unmoved, while you see it clearly proved from the teachings of inspiration, that your final ruin is awfully probable? Oh, ye undying spirits! ye heirs of eternity! Ye hardened and presumptuous sinners! upon whom the precursors of condemnation are gathering thick and dark;—will you refuse to believe that

you are in danger of hell, till you feel its unquenchable fires blazing around you ?

Do you reply, If our escape from the wrath to come be thus improbable, it will avail nothing to attempt it ; we will, therefore, dismiss at once all concern respecting our future destiny, and giving ourselves up to the pursuits and vanities of the world, enjoy life while we can ? Enjoy life ! And can life be enjoyed, while such a doom, like the naked sword suspended above the couch of the ancient reveler, is hanging over you, and may, at any moment, fall, and plunge you into the abyss ? What ! Enjoy life while God is forgotten, the Savior rejected, probation passing away, and the gulf of eternal woe opening beneath your feet ! Well may we say of such pleasure, "It is madness." It is far more insane than the mirth of the criminal who, condemned to die, and waiting the hour of execution, strives to banish his fears by singing and dancing, or drowns them in the stupor of intoxication. There is no necessity that you should resort to this desperate expedient ; for, although your destruction is probable, it is not yet inevitable ; and nothing but your own obstinate continuance in sin can render it so. Your case would indeed be hopeless,—the marks of perdition upon you would be ineffaceable,—were there not an Almighty Redeemer who is both able and willing to grant you his aid. While, therefore, you abandon all expectation of saving yourselves, go, in humility and faith, to his throne of grace, and fervently implore his omnipotent succor. Tell him that you have destroyed yourselves by rebellion against him ; that, with suicidal folly, you have raised impassable barriers between your souls and the mansions of his love ; that you do not deserve his compassion, and might justly be left to perish forever. In this way alone can deliverance be obtained. But a step so self-abasing I fear your proud and obdurate hearts will not consent to take. I fear that whatever apprehensions you may now feel will soon subside, and be succeeded by a still deeper lethargy. This I cannot prevent. I have no power to arrest the raging disease which is fast hurrying you to the "second death." I can only sit down beside you, and watch your moral symptoms, and weep as I contemplate their increasing violence, and breathe forth my earnest prayers to that great Physician who alone can remove them. To him I invite you. Seek him while he may be found. Seek him, ere yet the distemper of sin shall be beyond remedy, and mercy shall depart, and hope shall expire, and the "recording Angel," with a pen dipped in "the wine of the wrath of God," shall write on your foreheads, "INCURABLE."

SERMON CCCLII.

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ROCHESTER, NEW YORK.

ESTIMATES OF LIFE.

"For what is your life."—James iv. 14.

To reflect, to consider his ways, to draw from the past, lessons for the guidance of the future, this is one of the highest prerogatives of man. This it is that raises him above the brutes, and enables him to make all that is gone, tributary—subservient, to all that is to come.

And there are seasons peculiarly fitted for this work—*resting-points* in the journey of life, from which, if we are wise, we shall rigidly scrutinize the past, and seriously plan for the future—resolving to make, for that future, more of life, to live to better purposes—for higher, and nobler, and better ends, than we ever before have done.

Such, for example, is the day of our birth, at every return of which we should remember that then we commenced a deathless existence, and should ask ourselves how we are living—what we are doing as moral beings, and whether we are making that existence a blessing or a curse. Such, too, is every Sabbath, breaking in as it does upon the business and turmoil of the world—giving us a breathing space, as spiritual beings, and whispering to us of higher and holier things, and of our immortality. And such, especially, is the opening of every successive year, when the months of the past one have fled, each bearing with it the record of our sins, our follies, and our neglects, to write them in the judgment book.

At every such season, we are resting, as it were, for a moment, on some hill-top of probation. From it we clearly see the year that has gone. Its wasted hours rise up, like an accusing conscience, to reprove us. Its departed dead gaze upon us face to face. Its trials and

sorrows gush up afresh to our hearts, reminding us that "the past—the past, we never can forget." Its broken resolutions, its wasted opportunities, its misimproved privileges, the little progress we have made in self-improvement, the little we have done for God, or self, or the world; all these come over us, each with its pangs to our hearts, and in bitterness we could weep at the thoughts that, like scorpion stings, are piercing our inmost souls.

Such, to every reflecting mind, and with greater or less intensity, are somewhat the views which the flight of time suggests. And often are such ready to exclaim, "O! that I could go back,—that I could live over the years that are gone, that I might spend them differently, and to better purposes than they have been spent." But even if this were possible, it might not be best. And the only test of your sincerity in desiring it, is, how will you spend the future? If you really wish that the days now gone were again your own, that you might improve them to the utmost, then you will now begin, and will continue to live for days to come, as you think you would for the past, if that again were in your power. You will act on the wise suggestion, "Look not mournfully to the past; it comes not back again. Wisely improve the present; for it is thine. Go forth to meet the future, with holy purpose, and a resolute and manly heart; for thus you may make it your own." You will ponder the lessons which departed and coming years suggest, striving to make the most of them all. Of the multitudes of these lessons which might be suggested, several are brought to our view in the inquiry of our text—the solemn and pertinent inquiry, "What is your life?" On this question, in several of its aspects, it may be profitable to dwell. And,

I. *What is your life in its duration?*—It is short, very short. It is spoken of as a moment, as but a hand's breadth; and so, if you reflect, you will find it. Go ask the aged if their years have not fled like a dream, and their reply will tell you how short, in the review, life seems to them. Compare the whole of even the longest life with the endless years of eternity, and it will appear but as a drop to the fathomless ocean. Think of it in its actual duration, or its rapid progress; consider how much is given to infancy, and sleep, and rest, and sickness, and how much is wasted in idleness or worse than idleness, and it will seem to be speeding as on the lightning's wing. Estimate it by the rapid flight of its enjoyments or its sorrows, both of which pass like shadows or dreams;—by its hopes that delude, or its plans that mock us;—by its purposes, so few of which we fulfil, or its intended attainments, so few of which we ever make, and it will seem as but a moment. Go and measure it at the bed of death; take its dimensions by the gauge of the sepulchre;—look back from your last hour, and see how rapidly the whole of life has gone, and you will be amazed at its brevity—amazed to see how soon, from you, it has passed forever! From all these estimates you will feel, perhaps with mournful weight,—certainly with deep conviction, that life, in its dura-

tion, is very short; that it flies like a dream,—that it speeds like the wind.

II. *What is your life in its security?*—It is uncertain;—at any moment your hold on it may be loosed, and it may be gone forever. In allusion to the remark of David, that “there is but a step between us and death,” most strikingly has it been said, “that the whole course of life is ever parallel,—side by side with death; that death is not a precipice at a distance, toward which we are gradually coming, and over which we must bye and bye plunge, but a precipice, on the very brink of which we are all the while walking, and over which at any instant we may fall.” We are ever on the verge of life, always on the confines of eternity, always close upon the judgment, within a single step either of heaven or hell! And between the path we tread and the gulf by our side, there is no barrier to guard us—nothing to save us from falling—as others have fallen, at every point of that path. There is no certainty in your life. A single breath may blight, or an insect undermine it. A very moth may sever some one of the thousand cords that bind you to existence, or disease may breathe upon you, and you are gone! It is only to shut out a little air; only to let in some floating atom to rankle in your vitals; only to touch you with the finger of sickness, and all will soon be over, and your health, and bloom, and hopes will perish together in the grave. The Word of God declares, and every day confirms it, that life is of all things the most uncertain. Like the dew on the grass, it is exhaled in a moment. Like the leaf, before the autumn’s breath, it fades ere we think it. Like the vapor, the cloud, the dream, it is gone. Like the wave it passes while we behold it. Like the flower it withers and dies; and, as in the twinkling of an eye, we are in eternity!

III. *What is your life in its objects?*—God has given, and he is continuing your days for high and important ends. He is sparing you in life that in it you may prepare for your entire existence: that you may put away the moral stain, and break from the ruling power of sin; that you may turn to the ways of holiness, and seek his favor, and enter his service; that by his grace you may elevate and improve and ennoble your entire nature; that as physical, mental, social, and moral beings, you may aim at the highest possible perfection and strive for it, with all diligence and prayerfulness, with all your own, and all of God’s imparted strength. Life is the only season in which to mould yourself for immortality, to fix your grasp on heaven, to make God your friend; the only season for doing or getting good, for blessing your fellow men, and taking them with you to the skies. These are the great objects of life; and when it is once ended they can never be secured. The victory once unwon, it never can be gained: the prize once lost, it can never be recovered. To all eternity you may weep and lament it, but tears and lamentations will

then be in vain. *Now*, time may be improved and the great objects for which it is continued, may be attained; but once ended, its opportunities will rise again only to haunt you forever! And these alternatives,—fearful and momentous as they are—these are at the mercy of every passing moment. Whether all the high ends of existence shall be gained, or whether you shall fail to secure them, all this is at the hazard of life's uncertainty—at the hazard of its brevity. If they are not now secured, it is more than possible they never will be—more than possible that your life may pass away, and none of them ever be yours!

IV. *What is your life in its influence upon yourself?*—We have seen what are the great intended objects and ends of life. As life progresses are you gaining these ends? Are you making them your own? The world in which we live—the scenes that surround us are full of changes. And these changes, as they pass, never leave us as we were before. “Every one of them, like the thousand imperceptible touches by which time mellows a picture or eats into a ruin, leaves its trace behind it—here a stain and there a lustre; here adding strength and there working decay; here corroding the very heart, and there consolidating and coating it with a hard and imperishable shell.” At every moment, life as it passes, is stamping us with its influence—moulding us for better or worse, for endless life or endless death. There is not one of its passing moments; not an incident that occurs, or a friend that we meet; not a thought that springs up in the silence of the soul; not an obligation that is pondered; not a joy that cheers, or a sorrow that rends the heart, but by it we are changed as moral beings: not one of these, or of all the countless influences of life, of which it is not true, that it is to us, either “a savor of life unto life or of death unto death.” From our very character as moral beings, it cannot be otherwise than that at every moment we are making progress—that by every step we are pressing on either to life or death eternal. According to our use or abuse, our improvement or misimprovement of every incident and event of life, (for every one is a means of grace,) we are rising or sinking as moral beings. In a higher, and a far more fearful sense than the ancient artist, every one of us is “*painting for eternity*”—painting, each his own portrait, stroke by stroke, and line by line. And soon the image shall be finished; and when finished, it shall be hung up for our own gaze, and for the inspection of the universe—every part of it to grow brighter and brighter, or darker and darker forever! In eternity we shall see that no touch of life, no contact of probation was neutral in its influence; that by every one we made ourselves either better or worse; that each was like the falling water to us, drop by drop wearing away our hardness, or drop by drop, like that which falls in the dark caverns of the earth, casing us with incrustations of stone! And if all this be so, then,

V. *What is your life in its responsibilities?*—Every object—every influence of life implies responsibility. Every moment is, inwoven with obligation to God and to your own soul. On every part of it is written, “occupy till I come,” “for this you are to give account.” For all that life brings with it:—for the improvement or misimprovement of every opportunity and privilege; for time, that it be redeemed and wisely spent; for property, that we sacredly use it as God’s stewards; for our talents and influence, that they be so employed as to afford us joy at the day of judgment; for every thought, and word, and deed; for every mercy and every trial, for all these we are responsible—under obligation—and soon to be called to account before the judge of quick and dead. How solemn, and fearful even, is this aspect of life, showing us, as it does, that all we do and all we fail to do—that every act and every omission, is written in the book of God, and for it we are soon to be judged! This, then, suggests another, and the last inquiry,

VI. *What is your life, or rather what will it be in its results?*—Fleeting as it is, uncertain and soon to end, what will be its end to you? And the response is, that the end of probation is retribution—that its result to you will be either heaven or hell. God has left it to your own choice, whether by loving and serving him, you will make life the passway to salvation or perdition. One of the two it *must* be; and *which*, God permits you to choose, warning you that by that choice you are to abide forever! Repent of your transgressions as a violator of God’s law; believe in Christ as your Redeemer; live a life of faith, humility, love, and prayer, of self-denying and active holiness; put away every evil feeling, and wrong habit, and sinful action; cultivate your immortal nature by the rules of eternal truth; live for God in all things; do this, and when life is ended, as soon it shall be, heaven shall be your portion. Its crown and its harp shall be yours, and yours its joys that are unspeakable and full of glory. But neglect and put away all this,—go on in your disregard of God and his law; do violence to the better dictates of your own nature; heed not the calls and reproofs of conscience; turn away from the cross of Christ, and live not as God requires, and soon, as your life shall end, you shall go down to endless death, where in bitterness, but in vain, you shall wish that you had never lived, only to give point by life itself to the sting of death eternal to your soul. Remember, O! remember this, heir of immortality, that this life is your only probation, and all beyond it is retribution; that here only you are to sow, and hereafter to reap, either a harvest of glory or a harvest of death. Impress it upon your heart that this life is the threshold of eternity; it can be passed but once; a little care in passing it, and you are safe forever. It is the infancy of a deathless existence; a little watchfulness, and the manhood of your immortality is all that you could wish. But ah! if you will stumble as you pass that threshold,—if you will waste the childhood of your endless

being, and that too when you are warned against it, then will your eternity be one of fearfulness and lamentation and woe! To all eternity you will mourn that your "harvest is past, your summer is ended, and your soul is not saved!"

Such is your life! In its end, in its results; it is either heaven or hell to you. In its obligations, it throws around you the responsibilities of obedience or disobedience to God, and of salvation or perdition to yourself. Its great objects, as designed and enjoined by God, are, that you prepare for holiness and usefulness and heaven; and you bless others, and honor Christ, and work out your own salvation. In all its progress, by all its influence, it is moulding you for these ends, or for their fearful reverse. In its duration, it is, at longest, but very short, and even in its brevity it is uncertain; for at any moment it may be ended, bearing us, in its flight, to the judgment and all the retributions of eternity!

If then these things be so, how does it become us to live; how to pass the days of our sojourning here in fear, when they are so fast flying, and their issues are so momentous. If salvation or perdition is depending on our present moments and conduct, then how earnest should we be, first of all, to do the great work of life, to make God our friend, to lay up our treasure in heaven! If our life, by all its influences, at every step of its progress, is leaving an eternal impress on us; if by every incident, and at every moment, we are moulded for life or death eternal; then how sacredly diligent should we be, wisely to improve by all, by every thing to mount to heaven, and not to sink to despair. If life too is so uncertain, and we have no sure hold upon it, then what madness to live with its great work undone, and with the wrath of God hanging over us, when any moment may close our probation, leaving that work undone forever, and that wrath our endless portion! And if our life, at the longest, is so very short, then how earnestly should we redeem it, making the utmost of its hours while still they are continued to us! How should we guard ourselves against the waste of time, which is the waste of our own existence! How should we grasp "the present moment as it flies, and stamp the marks of wisdom on its wings, and like the good old patriarch of God's word, hold the fleet angel fast until he bless us!"

Our time is short. We are warned of it by the voice of inspired truth. We are warned of it by the flight of years, which, with all our follies and errors and sins, have gone to chronicle their record in the judgment book. Especially we are warned of it by the grave, that "pulpit of departed man, from which he speaks, his text and doctrine both, 'Thou too must die, and come to judgment.'" From the graves of departed friends or relatives, torn from us in years that are past; the child from the parent, and the parent from the child, the brother from the sister, and the sister from the brother, the husband from the wife, and the friend from the friend;—from all these comes back the monition, that *our* time is short—that *we* too must soon follow.

And the only safety is in being ever ready, that whenever death shall come, we may meet it with joy and not with grief. Come it will, to us, and that very soon.

"Whether we smile or weep,
Time wings his flight.
Days—hours—they never creep—
Life speeds like light !—

Whether we laugh or groan,
Seasons change fast.
Nothing hath ever flown,
Swift as the past.

Whether we chafe or chide,
On is time's pace.
Never his noiseless step
Doth he retrace.

Speeding, still speeding on,
How, none can tell,
Soon will he bear us
To heaven or to hell.

Dare not, then, waste thy days,
Reckless and proud,
Lest, while you dream it not,
Time spread thy shroud !"

Lest while you think not of his coming, the King of Terrors may be upon you, and you wake from the heedlessness and the dreams of time, to the realities of the final judgment and a lost eternity !

The opening year is a time for solemn reviews, serious reflections, and holy resolutions. These urge the importance of holier views of life, and corresponding purposes of living ; to begin the redemption of the past, which is lost, by improving, and thus lengthening the future that remains ; to search your hearts, to ask how you are living, and how you may live to better purpose, and to determine by God's grace to do it. Old or young, high or low, rich or poor, christian or impenitent, whoever you may be, *now* is the time to begin to live for higher ends, with holier hearts, with eternity more in your view, than ever yet you have done. Is God the witness that this is your purpose—that, his grace assisting you, it shall also be your performance ?

A few years since, a minister, in a neighboring State, supposed he had ascertained from prophecy, that the world would come to an end, and the Son of Man descend on a given day, which he named to his people. So fully and earnestly did he believe and preach this, that others began to believe it, and his meetings were thronged with those who, in the deepest solemnity, hung upon the truth he proclaimed. Christians were roused to a living, fervent zeal, and the impenitent, alarmed, in numbers began to ask what they should do to be saved. At last, the day on which he had fixed arrived. It was the Sabbath,

and to a dense mass of breathless immortals, and with full conviction on his part, he announced that on that day the Son of Man would descend, and come to judgment. The sermon was heard with weeping, and terror, and fear; and the breathless solemnity of that house no tongue could fully tell. The day, however, of course passed on, and the sun went down in calmness, showing that the preacher had utterly mistaken the meaning of the prophets. And yet if he had not, and if that day the Son of Man had descended, every one would have said that the earnestness of that congregation—that their anxiety to be prepared for the judgment was most reasonable, and that the reverse would have been the deepest folly—the sheerest madness! The judgment may be as near to *you* as *they* thought it was to them.—Another year or month, another week, another day, may bear you to it.

With this probability, then, before us, let us do with our might what our hands find to do, and do it now while yet we may. Let us be less anxious to live, than to live well; to live as we ought,—as God requires.

Thus shall we ever be ready for the coming of the Son of Man, and when we are called away, it will only be to our rest—to the paradise above.

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